DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 096 670 CS 201 562

AUTHOR Berryman, Charles
TITLE The Influences of Sex, Race, and Prior Reading Ability on Newspaper Reading Skill Improvement in the Elementary School.
NOTE 9p.; A research report to the American Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Elementary School Students; *Newspapers; *Racial Differences; *Reading Ability; Reading Improvement; Reading Research; *Reading Skills; *Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS Georgia; Wilkes County

ABSTRACT

This study uses the revised modules of a previous study of the effects of newspapers in elementary schools to determine the effects of the modules and newspaper use in general, as well as to determine whether the variables of sex, race, prior reading ability, and same or opposite race of teacher and student influenced results. The study was conducted in Wilkes County, Georgia, where all public school students in grades four through six attend one school. At the time of the study, mandatory statewide test results revealed that fourth-grade students were seven months below grade level and eighth graders were fourteen months below. Following a pretest, the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) Newspaper Test, Form J-1, 50 instructional modules were used for a period of 50 days in regularly scheduled social studies classes. Results from this second field test show that modular materials produced desired results. Elementary students scored highly significant gains in newspaper reading skills. Students did not differ significantly by sex. Gain was strongly influenced by prior reading ability. At two grade levels, race was not a factor in the amount of gain. Overall, results confirmed earlier studies that found the instructional modules to be effective. (SW)

ED 096670

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRE
SENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The Influences of Sex, Race, and Prior Reading Ability on Newspaper Reading Skill Improvement in the Elementary School

A Research Report to ANPA Foundation

Charles Berryman
Social Science Education
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia

CS 201 562

In a previous study of the effects of newspapers in elementary school using modular materials, it was found that highly significant reading skill gains were achieved by students in grades four, five, and six.[1] Skills in reading newspapers as measured by the ANPA Newspaper Tests and in general reading ability as measured by a standardized reading test both improved significantly. Several modifications in the modules were made as a result of the field test experience.

This study used the revised modules, since published, in a second field test.[2] In addition to determining the effects of the modules and newspaper use in general, this study attempted to determine whether the variables of sex, race, prior reading ability, and same or opposite race of teacher and student influenced results.

The research was conducted in Wilkes County, Georgia where all public school students in grades four-six in the county attend one school. Wilkes County is a rural county in northeast Georgia with one major town of Washington, the county seat. Although the county's population has a white majority, only 36% of students in these three grades are white. A substantial number of white students attend a private school that was organized when public schools were integrated.

As measured by mandatory state wide tests, at the time of the study fourth grade students were seven months below grade level and eighth graders fourteen months below. No data were available for grades five and six. Students in Wilkes County approximate state averages at their grade levels. Since family income is correlated with reading achievement and attendance of private school requires family economic resources, it seems likely that reading levels of public school students are not representative of the total population of either county or state.

The fifty instructional modules were used for a period of fifty days in regularly scheduled social studies classes in whatever manner chosen by the teacher. No teacher used one module per day, however. The newspaper was the Augusta Chronicle.[3] A pretest, the ANPA Newspaper Test, Form J-1, was given prior to instruction. Form J-2 was used as the posttest. These tests, developed by Educational Testing Service, are intended for junior high school students. Because of their reading level, they may underestimate the gains of elementary students. For example, one item poses a moral dilemma that teenagers recognize readily but with which elementary students often are not familiar. No elementary level test of this nature is available.

Based on existing school records, students were classified for research purposes into four reading levels. As reported in tables, level one consists of those reading at or above grade level. Level two includes those up to one year below grade level, level three from one to two years below, and level four those more than two years below grade level on national norms. Classes were homogeneously grouped on a variety of factors, and are reported in the tables from high to low as classified by the school. The classification system does have a high correlation with reading ability, but many other variables are considered.

Table 1 includes results by class for each grade level. With the exception of the lowest section in the fourth and sixth grades, all classes showed a significant gain. However, observation of scores of individuals showed that the significant gain in the bottom section of grade five was the result of quite high gains by some students while others had little or no gain. As subjectively evaluated by teachers, interest level

in newspaper use was higher among students of higher reading ability, although interest of all was judged to be higher than when classes used more conventional teaching materials. Exclusive use of newspapers, or any other material, for fifty consecutive class periods was solely for research purposes and is not recommended as a general practice.

TABLE 1
Gain by Grade Level and Class

Class	Gain	t	Level
4-1	6.25	7.02	.0005
4-2	6.16	8.21	.0005
4-3	4.38	7.82	.0005
4-4	3.11	3.89	.0005
4-5	3.58	3.93	.0005
4-6	-.14	--	NS
5-1	6.96	8.81	.0005
5-2	3.71	3.23	.005
5-3	9.19	9.28	.0005
5-4	3.71	5.33	.0005
5-5	2.81	3.31	.005
5-6	5.00	7.81	.0005
5-7	3.23	3.25	.005
6-1	3.33	4.06	.0005
6-2	5.42	6.23	.0005
6-3	8.50	9.04	.0005
6-4	6.75	12.98	.0005
6-5	4.69	6.25	.0005
6-6	5.12	5.57	.0005
6-7	1.96	3.16	NS

Results by reading level are included in Table 2. Gain declined from level to level in each grade. Levels one and two were significantly superior to levels three and four, and level three also was significantly better than four in the amount of gain. Observation of individual scores showed stability at levels one and two, with few students failing to gain substantially. Especially in grades five and six, scores were quite unstable

for the two lower reading levels. The average gain does not reflect the tendency for an individual either to do rather well or to show little evidence of gain. The data in this table suggest that, considering the cost of program operation, extensive efforts to teach newspaper reading skills in fourth grade probably are not warranted. Since a relatively high proportion of students in fourth grade do not improve substantially, there is a risk of creating negative attitudes toward newspaper reading as a result of frustration. Deferral of a systematic program until fifth or even sixth grade seems wise unless students are capable readers. While it is possible to procuce significant gains at fourth grade level, delay seems likely to produce better results at less cost and less risk.

TABLE 2
Gain by Reading Level by Grade

Grade	Reading Level 1	Reading Level 2	Reading Level 3	Reading Level 4
Four	5.158 (N=19)	5.333 (N=30)	3.518 (N=56)	2.979 (N=48)
Five	7.900 (N=10)	7.103 (N-29)	4.869 (N=61)	3.385 (N=65)
Six	8.083 (N=24)	6.436 (N=39)	4.780 (N=59)	2.226 (N=53)
Total Group	7.000 (N=53)	6.357 (N=98)	4.409 (N=176)	2.897 (N=166)

Table 3 includes gain scores by race and sex for each grade level. Students did not differ significantly by sex, although girls did have somewhat higher gains at each grade level. Given the difference in maturation rates for the sexes, this result was not unexpected. At fourth and fifth grade levels, students did not differ significantly by race in their gain scores. White students did have higher scores on both pretest and posttest, but students of both races were near equal in their benefit from instruction.

At sixth grade level, white students' gain of 7.48 as compared with 3.88 for black students was significantly superior. It seems doubtful that this result can be generalized, however. Of the seven classes at sixth grade, five were taught by one teacher in whose classes most of the variation by race occurred. Based on classroom observation, this researcher predicted that white students would have superior gains. In another study, black students were superior to white, with white students failing to make a significant gain.[4] In this case, all students were taught by a single teacher. It seems likely that teacher behaviors better explain these conflicting results than do assumptions of racial differences. A student's race may put him at a distinct disadvantage in a given classroom situation, however. This does not show deliberate teacher bias. It seems more likely that unintentional teacher behaviors may reflect bias to students, that student bias may inhibit learning, or that the two may interact to produce a less than satisfactory situation. For the three grades as a whole, there was no significant difference between students taught by a teacher of the same race and those taught by one of a different race.

TABLE 3
Gain by Sex, Race, and Grade

Grade	White Male	White Female	Black Male	Black Female	Total
Four	4.172	3.938	2.841	4.833	3.947
Five	4.829	6.514	4.255	4.271	4.861
Six	7.333	7.750	3.297	4.462	5.523

Table 4 includes gain scores by reading level for each of the four race-sex combinations. The overall mean gains for levels one and two were 7.000 and 6.357, respectively. These two levels each were significantly

superior to the two lower levels. The third level, with a mean gain of 4.409 was significantly superior to the fourth level, which had a mean gain of 2.879. Male students at level four accounted for much of the deficiency of this group. This result is consistent with previous findings at junior high school level.[5] For reasons as yet undetermined, teachers seemed unable to reach male students who read poorly. It may be hypothesized that in ego defense these students prefer not trying to risking failure despite an effort. There is a clear need for further research to attempt to find effective methods of improving newspaper reading skills of these students. Their sex alone is not an adequate explanation since males who read at grade level or above were superior to their female counterparts.

TABLE 4
Gain by Sex, Race, and Reading Level*

Reading Level	White Male	White Female	Black Male	Black Female
One	8.706 (N=17)	5.667 (N=27)	8.000 (N=2)	7.714 (N=7)
Two	6.355 (N=31)	7.223 (N=30)	4.923 (N=13)	6.042 (N=24)
Three	4.176 (N=34)	4.625 (N=16)	4.803 (N=61)	4.108 (N=65)
Four	1.917 (N=12)	3.400 (N=10)	2.063 (N=79)	4.015 (N=65)

*One - grade level or better
Two - up to one year below grade level
Three - one to two years below grade level
Four - over two years below grade level

In summary, it was concluded from this second field test that the modular materials produced desired results. These elementary students scored highly significant gains in newspaper reading skills. Fifth and sixth grade level one readers neared the level attained by the average high school student. Others were significantly lower than that level,

but the gain was judged important. Observations of individual scores led to the conclusion that systematic newspaper reading skills programs should not begin in fourth grade since many students did not profit. Selective use with average or better readers in fourth grade does seem likely to be effective, however.

Students did not differ significantly by sex. Gain was strongly influenced by prior reading ability. However, in the previous field test cited above, it had been found that newspaper use did improve general reading ability as measured by standardized tests. Newspaper use produces gain in both specific and general reading skills, therefore. A sex-reading ability combination of male poor readers was identified as the least successful group, and an important topic of further research thus identified. At two grade levels, race was not a factor in the amount of gain, although white students had higher scores than black on both pretest and posttest. A difference by race was found at sixth grade level, but it seemed likely that other unmeasured factors might better account for the superiority of gain by white students. A previous study had shown black students to be superior, and it was hypothesized that race was not an adequate explanation in either case.

Overall, results confirmed earlier studies that found the instructional modules to be highly effective.

Footnotes

[1]Charles Berryman. The Newspaper in the Elementary School: A Research Report to ANPA Foundation. 1972

[2]Charles Berryman. Improving Reading Skills. Atlanta: Atlanta Newspapers, Inc. 1973.

[3]The research project was conducted with the support of the Augusta Chronicle, Wilkes County Schools, and ANPA Foundation.

[4]Charles Berryman. Research Report to Miami Herald. 1973.

[5]Charles Berryman. "Improving Newspaper Reading Skills of Minority Group Poor Readers." Paper read at Temple University Curriculum Conference. 1972.